

Office of the Staff Judge Advocate

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-News from Camp Victory, Iraq

Welcome to Iraq...

...Now the adventure really begins

SGT Teresa Johnston

Congratulating his staff on a successful convoy, yet cautioning against future complacency, LTC Christopher O'Brien, 1st Cavalry Division's Staff Judge Advocate, recently briefed his soldiers on what role the OSJA will play during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

"We didn't know at the time but the location where [HQ 706] broke down was considered a high-danger sector," he said. "I'm very proud of those involved. It was a combat operation. But let's not forget that we are still in a combat zone and there are Iraqi nationals who are watching us and gathering intel."

While currently operating out of the back of a five-ton expando van equipped with electricity, the OSJA is awaiting completion of a Legal Services Center that will comfortably house the entire section.

"We have a wonderful building dedicated to legal services, thanks to CW2 [Anton] Streeter," LTC O'Brien said.

The building is scheduled for completion by 1 May.

Communication is still the one area in which all sections, including the OSJA, are suffering.



Getting Down to Business: (pictured left)

LTC Christopher O'Brien, center, briefs OSJA soldiers of what to expect during deployment. Pictured are MAJ Jim Agar, SPC Jon Coen and SFC Terry Watson (Photo by SGT Teresa Johnston)

Just Rewards: (right photo) LTC

Christopher O'Brien congratulates gunners for their hard work during the convoy by presenting them with 1st Cavalry Division OSJA coins. PFC Billy Brewer, far left, assistant gunner of the M240b, accepts the first coin given by the SJA. SGT Gabriel Galindo, M249 SAW gunner; and SPC Rick Bassham, M240b gunner; far right, wait to receive their coins. (Photo by SGT Teresa Johnston)



However, limited communications are expected to be up in approximately a week and the SJA called for patience.

"Everyone is asked to have patience. We aren't going to be able to operate as effectively as we did at Fort Hood," he said. "Right now--division-wide--everyone is a little discombobulated and it can be very frustrating not having the ability to communicate."

In other news the LTC O'Brien announced that SFC Terry Watson has come out on the Master Sergeant List with a sequence number of one.

"It would be great if we could promote [SFC(P) Watson] the same day we promote MAJ Agar [to LTC] and maybe even SPC(P) Bassham [to SGT]," he said.

MAJ Agar will be promoted on 1 May.

Deputy SJA applauds staff during convoy

MAJ Jim Agar

Deputy Staff Judge Advocate

Our convoy began on March 24th. After months of training and high expectations, the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate assembled in a convoy of five serials, each containing approximately 50 vehicles, for a total of more than 250 trucks, HMMWVs, and other vehicles. LTC O'Brien, SPC Coen (his driver), MAJ Teixeira, and SPC Burch lead our group in HMMWV HQ 75. SFC Watson, SFC Torri and SGT Galindo followed in HQ 76. SSG Trammel and PFC Lee piloted the five-ton expando truck HQ 706 (our mobile SJA office), with myself, SGT Johnston, SPC Bassham, and PFC Brewer bringing up the rear in HQ 77. CPT Du Pre, CPT Goba, CPT Petty, PV2 Clements and PV2 White found seats in the vehicles of other staff sections.

We assembled at 7:00 on the morning of the 24th. 1-7 Cavalry Regiment acted as our

escorts for the convoy. They formed us up, gave many security briefings and prepared the convoy for departure. We waited for hours before moving to the marshalling area a kilometer away, where we waited for several more hours. We finally left Camp New York around 4:00 p.m., bound for CSC (Convoy Supply Center) Navistar. This was the first time in weeks that we had left the compound on paved roads. The landscape appeared

We arrived at CSC Navistar two hours later at dusk. We waited in line for another two hours to fuel our entire convoy, and then pulled into a



Watchful Eye: MAJ Jim Agar, HQ77 commander, keeps an eye out for trouble as the convoy approaches Baghdad. (Photo by SGT Gabriel Galindo)

staging area for the night. Navistar sits on the border between Kuwait and Iraq. It serves as a giant truck stop for all vehicles entering and leaving Iraq.

Time Out: SFC Thomas Torri takes time to stretch his legs during a routine stop a few hours out of Baghdad. (Photo to by SGT Gabriel Galindo)

bleak and foreboding, however, everyone was grate-

ful to leave

Camp New York behind. In front of us was truly a sight to behold. To the front, a string of vehicles stretching north as far as the eye could see, each separated by a perfect interval of 25 meters. Speed was only about 25-30 MPH.

for dinner.

All the Soldiers in our office, including LTC O'Brien, slept on top of or next to our vehicles that night. We awoke at 3:00 a.m. and ate an MRE breakfast. Every vehicle was packed and running by 3:45 a.m. and we left CSC Navistar 15 minutes later at precisely 4:00 a.m. Not two minutes later we crossed the border into Iraq. In accordance with our orders, everyone in the convoy proceeded to place a magazine of ammunition into their weapons. A condition referred to as "Weapon Status: Yellow."

The road north looked surprisingly like an interstate highway in the United States, wide and well maintained. In the darkness, we could see dozens of oil wells flaring natural gas into the night. The brilliant flares served as the only sources of illumination in the pre-dawn hours. The first enemy we fought was drowsiness. Little sleep the night before, coupled with a lack of hot coffee caused many of us to get sleepy, but soon the dawn came revealing a stark countryside with little vegetation

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Convoy, continued from Page 2

and only a few people. While sparse, Iraq appeared unspoiled and natural. It possessed a beauty seldom seen in modern America. We continued north at a fast pace (about 40 MPH) to our next stop, ROM (Refuel on the Move) Kenworth.

ROM Kenworth fuels vehicles. That's it. Nothing more. The place looked like something out of "The Road Warrior" and all of us commented that we were glad not to be assigned there. After taking an hour or so to refuel our vehicles, we waited at the ROM site for another two hours for no apparent reason. Then we headed north again.

After driving a few miles we left the hardball and began to drive on dirt roads. For the next three hours we bumped and jostled our way along the roughest road possible. There was a certain method to this madness. By taking the road less traveled, the Army avoided dense urban areas where insurgent attacks were more likely or where the convoy could get bogged down in traffic. The dirt road, while dusty and more rugged, provided safety. As we drove along the dirt road, each vehicle created a plume of dust like smoke

Keeping in Contact:

SFC Terry Watson (pictured right) radios other OSJA vehicles in the convoy during a routine stop near Scania. (Photo by SGT Teresa Johnston)



from a grass fire. Dust fell everywhere and nothing that was not tightly packed away escaped the fine beige powder, which permeated everything. We passed dozens of convoys headed south. They seemed delighted at finally going home. Each vehicle that passed us

eral vehicles had to be towed to the next stop.

Repairing a vehicle just isn't an option sometimes. Our procedures called for a 15-minute time frame to repair or tow a broken vehicle. We don't abandon vehicles except in life-threatening circumstances. Several wreckers and mechanics



Securing the Area: PFC Billy Brewer, assistant gunner, stands ready at the M240b mounted on the back of HQ 77. (Photo by SPC Rick Bassham)

dusted our convoy with a little piece of Iraq.

Several vehicles fell victim to the dirt road. One trailer lost an entire wheel that simply jumped off the axle and rolled into a nearby trash pile. Other vehicles blew tires or transmissions and sev-

erally accompanied the convoy north and all found gainful employment along the dirt road leading to Baghdad. Fortunately, the SJA section did not have any vehicle breakdowns in this area. Even the 20 year-old five-ton expando van (which nobody thought would make the journey to Baghdad in one piece) drove like a champ.

We left the dirt road and arrived at our final stop

for the day: CSC Scania. Essentially another big Army truck stop. We arrived in the late afternoon for an overnight stay, giving us ample time to fuel up and eat dinner at the DFAC. Again, we slept ON our vehicles with a departure slated for the next morning at 4:00. The hot food, ample rest, and our close proximity to Baghdad (Scania is just 50 miles south of the great city) put everyone in high spirits. We were almost there and life at Camp Victory (North) would be good, certainly better than our existence at Camp New York.

The final drive was not without risks. The area between CSC Scania and Baghdad is referred to as "Indian Country." Multiple convoys before us had suffered IED-, RPG- and small arms attacks in this area, far more than in any other area we had traversed so far. Baghdad was even more problematic, requiring an elevation in our weapons status to "Red," meaning all weapons had a round in the chamber, ready to fire, safeties on. We left CSC Scania late the next morning, around 6:30 a.m. The drive north would only take 3 hours. The convoy

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snaked along what appeared to be an interstate highway at 45 MPH.

For 15 minutes all seemed fine.

And then it happened.

HQ 706, the five-ton expando van driven by SSG

Trammel, developed a problem with one of the wheel hubs. The dry hub began to overheat and soon the 20 year-old behemoth slowed to a crawl, the defective hub now acting as a brake on the large truck. The convoy drove on, leaving HQ 706 stranded on the side of the road. SSG Trammel was not alone. PFC Lee stayed with the truck and soon the trail vehicle of the convoy came up to radio for help. Mechanics descended on HQ 706 with a wrecker and HQ 77, to include myself, SGT Johnston, SPC Bassham, and PFC Brewer pulled security while the mechanics tried to fix the old five-ton truck. The rule of thumb was 15 minutes to repair or tow, however, we could not repair a broken hub in the desert and the wrecker was already towing another vehicle.

Fifteen minutes also had another implication:



Vehicles stranded longer than 15 minutes in this sector could expect to be attacked or looted.

For the next 90 minutes we remained with HQ 706 and the mechanics. We all maintained an aggressive "Don't try it" posture in hopes of deterring any wayward Iraqis who might harbor bad intentions. SPC Bassham and PFC Brewer manned the M240B machine gun, pointing the crew-served weapon at every Iraqi vehicle that passed. SGT Johnston crouched with her M-16, ready to engage anyone in her sector that posed a threat to our small party. With her SAW automatic weapon, PFC Lee covered the opposite side of our vehicles. A mechanic herself, SSG Trammel tried to find a solution to get HQ 706 moving again.

I just tried to remain calm.

We were alone for what seemed an eternity. Both

Convoy, continued from, Page 3

Job Well Done:

HQ 77 and her crew, pictured from left to right, MAJ Jim Agar, SGT Teresa Johnston, SPC Rick Bassham and PFC Billy Brewer) stayed busy during the last day of the convoy providing security at three vehicle recovery sites. (Photo by SGT Gabriel Galindo)

CSC Scania and our convoy were out of radio range and it appeared we could neither repair nor tow HQ 706. We were alone in Indian Country, in the very place the convoy leaders had told us NOT to break down.



What the...?: This trailer lost a wheel directly in front of HQ 77 during the convoy. Fortunately, the trailer continued to roll (as did the tire), but has now become the subject of many jokes in the SJA office. (Photo by MAJ Jim Agar)

Abandoning the vehicle was not an option. Previous convoys had done so, only to find their vehicles looted or stolen in only a matter of minutes.

As we waited for SSG Trammel and the mechanics to fix the truck, two helicopters

from a quick reaction force (QRF) arrived on the scene to provide additional security.

Passing convoys further secured the area and soon SSG Trammel had devised a scheme to fix the vehicle being towed by the wrecker, enabling HQ 706 to be towed to Baghdad. We were moving again, with HQ 706 in tow. The crisis was over. After picking up several other stragglers on the road to Baghdad, we rejoined the convoy at FOB Falcon and after a short visit with CPT Wyndel Darville, continued to

Camp Victory. We arrived without incident.

During this convoy, the NCOs and Soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division's Office of the Staff Judge Advocate demonstrated remarkable professionalism and devotion to duty. I feel very

fortunate to serve with all of them and if the trials of this convoy are any indication of things to come, I believe we can expect great things of this extraordinary band of soldiers. It is an honor and a privilege for me to serve with them.

FIRST TEAM!

OSJA profile

SSG Trammel combines army life with family

SGT Teresa Johnston

(Editor's Note: This is the first of a weekly series dedicated to profiling members of the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate.)

Balancing an army career and a dual-military family is a real challenge to Katara Trammel, but it is one she handles easily by sticking to a simple premise: "I'm here to serve. It's what I do."

These words come not six months after the birth of her first child.

And with the help of technology SSG Trammel doesn't plan on missing any of Keyon's "firsts." Before she left for Iraq the Baton Rouge native gave her mother-in-law a video camera so that her daughter's first year could be recorded and then mailed across an ocean to *both* of her deployed parents.

That's right. Her husband is in Iraq as well.

Stationed at FOB Falcon, SFC Jermal Trammel is a track mechanic with A Company, 515th Forward Support Battalion. Although only about 20 minutes from one another it's not always easy to link up.

"I don't know how often we will get to see one another. I was supposed to go there recently but the trip was cancelled," she said. "Jermal said that if it was going to be too dangerous for us to get to one another then we'll just have to communicate through email for now."

SSG Trammel got married on 26 February 2004, right before the 1st

Cavalry Division deployed to Iraq. The name change has caught more than a few OSJA personnel by surprise, as evidenced by the phrase, "SSG Moore...oh, I mean Trammel." However, she takes it in stride and responds to either name.

During the deployment, SSG Trammel will be the NCOIC of the Claims Section of the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate.

With a brand new family, to include her husband, daughter Keyon and five-year old Tiara, SSG Trammel still thinks of herself as a soldier first.

Her military career began in the reserves in 1994 while still at Capitol High School, but after two-and-a-half years she decided to come on active duty as a 62B, construction equipment mechanic. Promotion opportunities were hard to come by in that MOS so she reclassified to 27D, paralegal, in January 2003 after spending a year of On the Job Training at DISCOM legal center.

While in the reserves, SSG Trammel worked at American Express as a customer service representative, but she truly appreciates her role as a Non-Commissioned Officer in the U.S. Army because it is a round-the-clock job.

"I love soldiers. "It comes from having a great NCO who was a real



mentor to me," she said.

"In a [civilian] job you go to work and come home. That's it. But in the army you've got soldiers all the time, regardless of what is going on."

And that's why she sticks with it.

In the short-term, SSG Trammel plans to finish her associate's degree and successfully complete 1st Cavalry Division's deployment mission. Her most important goal in the upcoming six months is going home on R&R for her daughter's first birthday in August. "Hopefully, Jermal and I can both get R&R at the same time. We'll fly Tiara in so that we can all celebrate Keyon's first birthday," she said. "After that, maybe we'll take a family cruise."

And then it's back to Iraq for another six months.

"I'd love to be home raising my daughter, but this is what I signed up for so this is what I do," SSG Trammel said.

"It's your team. It's our team. It's the First Team!"